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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS MAGAZINE
MARCH/APRIL 2015

NO REAL POET
EVER WOVE IN NUMBERS
ALL HIS DREAMS

POETRY NATION

INSIDE

Rosa Parks
and the Struggle for Justice

A Powerful
Poem of Racial Violence

PLUS

- ▶ Walt Whitman's Words
- ▶ American Women Poets
- ▶ How to Read a Poem



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This mural by George R. Barse Jr. depicting Lyric Poetry (Lyrica) adorns the second floor east corridor in the Library's Thomas Jefferson Building. *Carol Highsmith*



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS MAGAZINE

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JAMES H. BILLINGTON
Librarian of Congress

GAYLE OSTERBERG
Executive Editor

AUDREY FISCHER
Editor

JOHN H. SAYERS
Managing Editor

ASHLEY JONES
Designer

SHAWN MILLER
Photo Editor

Contributing Writers

MARWA AMER
PETER ARMENTI
MATTHEW BLAKLEY
ROBERT CASPER
CATALINA GÓMEZ
JEANNE THEOHARIS
STEPHEN WESSON
CHARLES WRIGHT

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ON THE COVER: Excerpts from the poem "Unexpressed" by Adelaide Proctor (1825-1864) adorn panels along the second floor north and south corridors in the Library's Thomas Jefferson Building. *Carol Highsmith*

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Introduction to Poetry Billy Collins

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

*From "The Apple that Astonished Paris,"
1996. University of Arkansas Press,
Fayetteville, Ark. Copyright 1988 by
Billy Collins*

READ A POEM OUT LOUD

FORMER POET LAUREATE Billy Collins offers his advice to high-school students on reading poetry aloud. "A poem will live or die depending on how it is read," he says. What follows, then, are a few pointers about the oral recitation of poetry. Get your poem a few days in advance so you will have time to practice.



▲ Billy Collins reads at the Library's 2014 National Book Festival. *Kimberly Powell*

Here are a few basic tips:

- Read the poem slowly. Most people read rapidly, and a nervous reader will tend to do so in order to get the reading over with. Reading a poem slowly is the best way to ensure that the poem will be read clearly and understood by its listeners. A good way for a reader to set an easy pace is to pause for a few seconds between the title and the poem's first line.
- Read in a normal, relaxed tone of voice. It is not necessary to give any of these poems a dramatic reading as if from a stage. Poems that are written in a natural style should be read that way. Just speak clearly and slowly and let the words of the poem do the work.
- Poems come in lines, but pausing at the end of every line will create a choppy effect and interrupt the flow of the poem's sense. You should pause only where there is punctuation, just as you would when reading prose, only more slowly.
- Use a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words and hard-to-pronounce words. To read with conviction, you need to know at least the dictionary sense of every word. In some cases, you might want to write out a word phonetically as a reminder of how it should sound.

During his term as Poet Laureate (2001-2003), Billy Collins launched the Poetry 180 project, designed to give high-school students a poem a day to read out loud during the school year. It remains one of the most popular features of the Library's website. Collins' "Introduction to Poetry" (left) is the first poem on the Poetry 180 site.

► MORE INFORMATION

Poetry 180 Website
loc.gov/poetry/180

THE VERSE OF YOUTH

POPULAR POETRY PROGRAMS GIVE YOUNG PEOPLE A PLATFORM FOR EXPRESSION.

National Poetry Month, celebrated each April, provides an opportunity to encourage new readers and writers of verse. Poetry events and competitions can also interest young people in this genre.



▲ Young people perform in the Poetry Slam competition at the Library's 2014 National Book Festival.

Poetry slams have risen in popularity among young people wanting to give a voice to their own narratives. Slam poetry is a subgenre of poetry that fuses the craft of public performance and the craft of poetry. Some slam poems are performed using a rhythmic, or Hip-Hop style, while others may be performed with more theatrical elements.

The Library of Congress hosted its first-ever Poetry Slam at the 2014 National Book Festival. The event, titled "Stage [Heart] Page," was sponsored jointly by the Library's Poetry and Literature Center in the Center for the Book, Split This Rock and the National Endowment for the Arts. The competition, which featured eight contestants from the District of Columbia's top youth slam groups, the DC Youth Slam Team and Louder Than a Bomb DMV, was judged by internationally acclaimed slam poet Gayle Danley, author and

singer-songwriter Tanuja Desai Hidier and Maryland State Sen. Jamie Raskin.

"This is a poetry slam; this is an interactive art form," said poet and spoken-word performer Elizabeth Acevedo, who emceed the event. "Someone gets up here, they are saying words. These might be words that they've never said before. They want to know that you are here and that you are listening. So you've got to clap. You've got to do whatever you need to do to let them know that you are here."

The Library also hosted the top winners of the Poetry Out Loud national competition at the 2014 National Book Festival, as it has done since the poetry program's nationwide inception in 2006. Each participant performed favorite poems and answered questions posed by the audience.

Poetry Out Loud, a competition with high school, regional and national rounds, requires its contestants to memorize and recite poems pulled from a predetermined and aesthetically diverse list. It is sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Poetry Foundation.

"Poetry Out Loud encourages young people across the country to learn about classic and contemporary poetry through memorization and recitation," said Eleanor Billington of the NEA. "Poetry Out Loud not only helps students learn a poem, but they're also building life skills. They're learning analytical skills, they're also building self-confidence and they're learning about their literary heritage."

—Matthew Blakley is the program support assistant in the Library's Poetry and Literature Center.

► MORE INFORMATION

View the Library's Poetry Slam
go.usa.gov/tx8m

View the Library's Poetry Out Loud Event
go.usa.gov/3c4J4

Learn more about River of Words
read.gov/letters/



RIVER OF WORDS

River of Words, an international poetry and art contest, was co-founded in 1995 by writer Pamela Michael and poet Robert Hass, during his tenure as Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry (1995-1997) to help young people express their feelings about the environment. Administered by the Center for Environmental Literacy at Saint Mary's College of California in affiliation with the Library's Center for the Book, the program is the world's largest competition of its kind. Prizes are awarded to K-12 students for their poems and artwork about the environment. Pictured above is "River Dream" by Anna Qian of Lilburn, Ga., age 13.

LITERARY ARCHIVES

POETRY AND LITERARY RECORDINGS SPANNING SEVEN DECADES WILL SOON BE FREELY AVAILABLE ONLINE.

In the spirit of preserving and promoting poetry, literature and the spoken word, the Library's Hispanic Division and Poetry and Literature Center have begun a collaborative effort to bring two paramount literary audio archives to an online audience worldwide.

Compiled in the Library, with curatorial acumen spanning more than 70 years, the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape and the Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature will comprise this online feature. These two collections of recorded interviews and readings of their own works by prominent poets and authors will soon be freely available to anyone, anywhere with an internet connection.

Housed in the Library's Packard Campus for Audio-Visual Conservation in Culpeper, Va., many of these readings were previously recorded on magnetic tape reels, making it necessary for them to be digitized by the Library's Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division.

Available as streamed audio, the online archive will be launched in two parts. The Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature will be launched with 50 recordings in April 2015, during National Poetry Month. The Archive of Hispanic Literature will also launch with 50 recordings, during Hispanic Heritage Month, Sept. 15–Oct. 15. Additional material will be added on a monthly basis, from these collections and other literary events.

This collaboration between the Hispanic Division and the Poetry and Literature Center brings to full circle the wishes of Archer Milton Huntington, the benefactor who, in the late 1930s, endowed both offices within the Library of Congress for the promotion of art, literature and Luso-Hispanic culture.

AUDIO ARCHIVES



▲ Nobel prize-winning poet Pablo Neruda records a reading of his work in the Library's recording studio. *Prints and Photographs Division*

The Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape and the Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature were both begun in 1943—by then-assistant chief of the Hispanic Division Francisco Aguilera and former

Consultant in Poetry Allen Tate, respectively.

The Archive of Hispanic Literature collection contains nearly 700 recordings of poets, novelists and essayists from the Luso-Hispanic world, including Nobel Prize winners Gabriel García Márquez, Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz and Juan Ramón Jiménez.

The Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature contains nearly 2,000 recorded readings of poetry and prose. Highlights include Consultants in Poetry Elizabeth Bishop, Gwendolyn Brooks and Robert Frost; Nobel Laureates Mario Vargas Llosa and Czesław Miłosz and writers Ray Bradbury, John Cheever and Kurt Vonnegut.

The project is the seed for what promises to be a growing repository from around the library and around the U.S. and the world—a central go-to place for the literary audio experience.

—Catalina Gómez is a program coordinator in the Hispanic Division.

◉ MORE INFORMATION

Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature
loc.gov/collections/archive-of-recorded-poetry-and-literature

AMERICAN WOMEN POETS

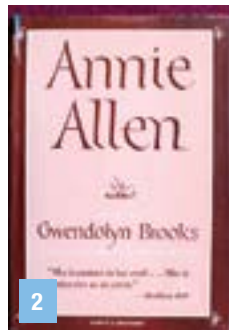
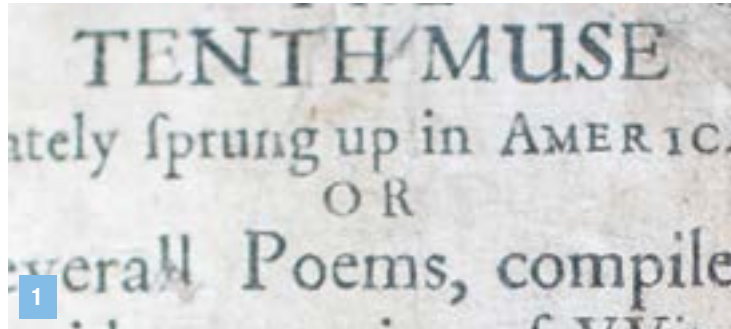
AMERICAN HISTORY SPECIALIST ROSEMARY FRY PLAKAS HIGHLIGHTS SEVERAL WOMEN POETS WHOSE WORKS ARE REPRESENTED IN THE LIBRARY'S RARE BOOK AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DIVISION.

1. Anne Dudley Bradstreet

British-born Anne Bradstreet (1613-1672) was the first woman poet to be published in colonial America. Her poems were first published in London in 1650, followed by an expanded edition published posthumously in Boston in 1678.

"Both in her breadth of subjects—home, family, nature, history, philosophy and religion—and in her sensitivity to prejudices against women's writings, Bradstreet is a worthy pathfinder for the women who have followed her."

"The Tenth Muse lately Sprung up in America," London, 1650



3. Mercy Otis Warren

Poet and dramatist Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814) drew on her literary talents, democratic convictions and friendships with patriot leaders to produce her three-volume commentary on the American Revolution.

"This singed title page of Thomas Jefferson's personal copy shows how close it came to the flames of the Christmas Eve 1851 fire that destroyed nearly two thirds of the books Jefferson had sold to Congress in 1815."

"History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution," Boston, 1805

2. Gwendolyn Brooks

In 1950, Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000) became the first African American to receive the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. "In her prize-winning work 'Annie Allen,' Brooks provides a poignant portrait of a young black girl in Chicago as a daughter, wife and mother." After many productive years of writing and teaching, Brooks became the first African American woman to serve as the Library's Consultant in Poetry, 1985-1986.

"Annie Allen," New York, 1949



5. Phillis Wheatley

African-born poet Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) was a slave educated by her Boston owner's wife, who encouraged her to publish her poems. This collected work was published by the Countess of Huntingdon in London, where Wheatley had been welcomed by Benjamin Franklin and abolitionists Grenville Sharpe and the Earl of Dartmouth. "Her portrait was probably drawn by the African American artist Scipio Moorhead, whose creative talents are praised in one of Wheatley's poems."

"Poems on Various Subjects: Religious and Moral," London, 1773

4. Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson's (1830-1886) beloved poem "Success"—one of the few published during her lifetime—was submitted without her permission by childhood friend and fellow poet Helen Hunt Jackson (1830-1885). "Jackson urged Dickinson relentlessly to publish her poems and wished to be her literary executor, but alas, Jackson died the year before Dickinson."

[George Parsons Lathrop] editor, "A Masque of Poets," No Name Series [v. 13] Boston, 1878



A WHITMAN SAMPLER

THE LIBRARY'S LIST OF "BOOKS THAT SHAPED AMERICA" SPARKED A NATIONAL CONVERSATION ON BOOKS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN OUR LIVES.

The Library's list of "Books That Shaped America" includes Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," a compilation that began with the 1855 publication of a slim, 95-page volume of 12 poems. The book underwent many revisions during the poet's lifetime. Whitman, who continuously altered the contents, regarded each version of "Leaves of Grass" as its own distinct book. He added new poems, named or renamed old ones, and, until 1881, repeatedly regrouped them. He developed the typography, appended annexes, reworded lines, and changed punctuation, making each edition unique. The collection culminated with the "deathbed" edition in 1892, comprising more than 400 poems.



Over almost 40 years, Walt Whitman produced these multiple editions of "Leaves of Grass." *Rare Book and Special Collections Division.*

Among the collection's best-known poems are "I Sing the Body Electric," "Song of Myself," and "O Captain! My Captain!" The elegy to the slain President Abraham Lincoln was added to the fourth edition, published in 1867. (See page 7.)

The title was a pun. "Leaves" referred to the pages on which it was printed and "grass" was a derogative term for literary works of little value.

Taken as a whole, the poems reflect Whitman's philosophy of life and humanity, with an emphasis on nature and the physical body. His exaltation of the human form was considered immoral, in its day, and some labeled it "obscene literature." Also controversial was the fact that few of the verses rhymed. The controversies only served to increase sales: the first printing sold out in one day.

◀ Portrait of Walt Whitman, 1870 | *Feinberg-Whitman Collection, Prints and Photographs Division*

► MORE INFORMATION

View the exhibition "Books That Shaped America"
loc.gov/exhibits/books-that-shaped-america

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

When President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865, a war-weary nation was plunged into shock. The murder of the president seemed to be a bloody, pointless end to the protracted Civil War. There was a great outpouring of grief across the country, and poems and songs were written mourning the nation's loss.

One American who grieved for the fallen president was the poet Walt Whitman, who had lived in Washington for most of the war and was a great admirer of Lincoln. He often saw the president riding around town on horseback, and the two men sometimes exchanged cordial bows.

Lincoln's death inspired Whitman to write one of his most memorable works—a simple, three-stanza poem of sorrow that bore little resemblance to his other, more experimental writings. "O Captain! My Captain!" was published in New York's Saturday Press in November of 1865, and was met with immediate acclaim. The poem, which spoke to readers throughout the shattered nation, was widely reprinted and anthologized during Whitman's lifetime.

"O Captain! My Captain!" became one of the most popular poems Whitman would ever write, and helped secure for him a position as one of the greatest American poets of the 19th century. He often recited the poem at his popular lectures on Lincoln.

Whitman revised the poem several times after its initial publication. When he noticed several errors in this printing (pictured at left), he mailed the page to the publishers with his corrections marked in ink.

— Stephen Wesson is an educational resource specialist in the Educational Outreach Division of the Office of Strategic Initiatives.

◀ Letter and corrected reprint of Walt Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!" with comments by author, Feb. 9, 1888. Walt Whitman Collection, Manuscript Division

▶ MORE INFORMATION

View the exhibition "Revising Himself: Walt Whitman and Leaves of Grass"
loc.gov/exhibits/whitman

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

BY WALT WHITMAN.

I.

O CAPTAIN! my captain! our fearful trip is done
 The ship has weathered every track, the prize we sought is won
 The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
 While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring.
 But O heart! heart! heart!
~~Leave you not the little spot~~
 Where on the deck my captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

II.

O captain! my captain! rise up and hear the bells
 Rise up! for you the flag is flung, for you the bugle trills:
 For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths, for you the shores a-crowd-
 ing:
 For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning.
 O captain! dear father!
 This arm ~~I push beneath you~~
 It is some dream that on the deck
 You've fallen cold and dead.

III.

My captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still:
 My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will.
~~But the ship,~~ The ship is anchored safe, its voyage closed and done:
 From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won!
 Exult, O shores! and ring, O bells!
 But I, with silent tread,
 Walk the spot my captain lies
 Fallen cold and dead.



THE POWER OF A POEM

BY AUDREY FISCHER

BILLIE HOLIDAY'S ICONIC SONG ABOUT RACIAL INEQUALITY WAS PENNED BY A POET WHOSE WORKS ARE PRESERVED IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Recorded in 1939, Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" brought the topic of lynching to the commercial record-buying public.

Few may be aware that the song was based on a poem written several years earlier by Abel Meeropol (1903-1986), a Jewish high-school teacher from the Bronx, who was deeply affected by a 1930 photograph of a lynching.

“STRANGE FRUIT”

Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root
Black bodies swingin' in the Southern breeze
Strange fruit hangin' from the poplar trees
Pastoral scene of the gallant South
The bulgin' eyes and the twisted mouth
Scent of magnolias sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burnin' flesh
Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop



Born in the Bronx, Meeropol attended DeWitt Clinton High School, where he later taught English. The school's other notable creative alumni include James Baldwin, Countee Cullen, Richard Rodgers, Burt Lancaster, Stan Lee, Neil Simon and Ralph Lauren.

Meeropol published most of his work under the pseudonym “Lewis Allan,” in memory of the names of his two stillborn children. In 1937, his poem originally titled “Bitter Fruit” was published under his given name in the Teachers' Union publication “The New York Teacher” and under his pen name, in the Marxist publication “The New Masses.”

Meeropol later set it to music and gave it to the owner of Café Society, an integrated cabaret club in New York's Greenwich Village. The club owner shared it with Billie Holiday, one of the club's regular performers, who sang it at the end of a set in 1938—to a stunned audience. She recorded it the following year under the title “Strange Fruit.” In 1999, Time magazine named “Strange Fruit” the song of the century. In 2002, it was selected for preservation in the inaugural National Recording Registry.

Like many who railed against social injustice during the 1930s, Meeropol was a member of the Communist party. At a Christmas party at the home of civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, Meeropol and his wife were introduced to the young children of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, a couple convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage. The children were orphaned when their parents were executed in 1953 at the height of the McCarthy Era. A few weeks later, the children were sent to live with the Meeropols and took their last name.

Meeropol, who taught until 1945, continued to write songs for such artists as Peggy Lee and Frank Sinatra. One of his more well-known works, “The House I Live In,” was sung by Sinatra in a 10-minute short film written by Albert Maltz. The 1945 film, which was made to oppose anti-Semitism and racial prejudice at the end of World War II, received an honorary Academy Award and a special Golden Globe award in 1946. In 2007, it was added to the list of films selected for preservation in the National Film Registry.

▲ Abel with wife Anne Meeropol, the first person to sing “Strange Fruit” in public, circa 1935 | *Courtesy of Michael and Robert Meeropol*

◀ This portrait of Billie Holiday performing in a New York nightclub appeared in *Down Beat* magazine in 1947. *William P. Gottlieb, Gottlieb Collection, Music Division*



NATIONAL POETS

THE NATION'S MOST ACCLAIMED POETS HAVE HELPED THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PROMOTE POETRY FOR NEARLY 80 YEARS.

BY PETER ARMENTI

The highest poetry office in the country belongs—both literally and symbolically—to the U.S. Poet Laureate. Headquartered at the Library's Poetry and Literature Center in the attic of the Thomas Jefferson Building, the Poet Laureateship is the only national position dedicated to raising awareness and appreciation of poetry among the American public.

FROM CONSULTANT TO LAUREATE

Originally established in 1936 as an endowed Chair of Poetry in the English Language, the position, as conceived by Librarian of Congress Herbert Putnam, was created to build the Library's literary collections and encourage their public use. The Library's Consultant in Poetry, in other words, was expected to perform duties today carried out by full-fledged librarians. This is reflected in a memo to poet Allen Tate (1943-1944) outlining his duties, which were limited not to only poetry but to "all English and American literature." Tate was appointed by Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish, himself a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet.

During the next 50 years, less emphasis was placed on requiring the Consultant in Poetry to develop the Library's collections and more on organizing local poetry readings, lectures, conferences and outreach programs. A defining moment came in 1985, when Sen. Spark M. Matsunaga's two-decade campaign to create a national Poet Laureate position resulted in an act of Congress (Public Law 99-194), which changed the consultant's title to "Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry" and charged the Librarian of Congress with making the selection. (See page 15.)

Opposite, from left: Poet Archibald MacLeish served as Librarian of Congress from 1939 to 1944. *George Fayer, Prints and Photographs Division*

Herbert Putnam served as Librarian of Congress from 1899-1939 | *Frances Benjamin Johnston, Prints and Photographs Division*

Background image: The Poetry and Literature center | *Abby Brack Lewis*

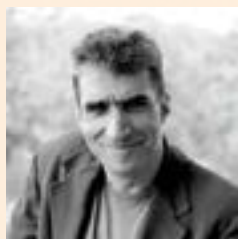


Prints and Photographs Division

Written by Joseph Auslander upon being appointed the first Consultant in Poetry (1937-1941):

The simple phrase of gratitude
Is something rather felt than heard:
Your quiet graces ruse
The overstrident thought or word.
Wherefore this letter I indite
returns in but a meagre measure
The courtesy that gave delight,
The fellowship that furnished pleasure.

FAVORITE POEM PROJECT



Robert Pinsky, who served an unprecedented three terms (1997-2000), issued a national call for people to send him their favorite poems, along with

their justifications. Pinsky received more than 18,000 submissions to his Favorite Poem Project. Selected submissions were subsequently gathered into three poetry anthologies.

The centerpiece of the project was the development of 50 video documentaries featuring people reading and discussing their favorite poems. The videos, which aired as segments on PBS's "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," can be viewed on the Favorite Poem Project website and are a permanent part of the Library's Archive of Recorded Poetry and Literature. The project endures today, with six recent videos featuring the favorite poems of Chicagoans and plans for more videos in the future.



AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY PROJECT

Ted Kooser (2004-2006) initiated the American Life in Poetry

Project to introduce poetry to a broad range of readers through his free weekly poetry column in newspapers and online publications. Each column consists of short poems that an average reader can understand and appreciate, along with a few introductory words from Kooser. The project, which continues after a decade and more than 500 columns, has been immensely successful in reaching millions of readers each week.

In 1986, Robert Penn Warren became the first poet appointed under the new title, having been the Library's third Consultant in Poetry more than 40 years earlier. Howard Nemerov (1963-1964; 1988-1990) and Stanley Kunitz (1974-1976; 2000-2001) also have the distinction of serving twice, each having been appointed Poetry Consultant and Poet Laureate.

"The Poet Laureate post is an honor, not a job," said Pinsky.

By including "Poet Laureate" in the title, the position became the American equivalent of the well-known and longstanding position of British Poet Laureate. As a result, the visibility of the office, along with expectations for it, ballooned. Librarian of Congress James H. Billington described the Poet Laureate as "the nation's official lightning rod for the poetic impulse of Americans." Dr. Billington has appointed all but two of the 20 Poets Laureate. (See page 15). In June 2014, he appointed Charles Wright the 20th Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. (See page 28.)

PROMOTING POETS AND POETRY

Fostering the work of promising poets has long been an interest, if not a responsibility, of the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. Each year the Poet Laureate selects two or more poets to receive the Witter Bynner fellowship. The fellows are recognized at a reading in the nation's capital and go on to organize local poetry readings in their own communities.

Administered by the Library of Congress, the fellowship is sponsored by the Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry. Harold Witter Bynner (1881-1968) was a prolific poet and philanthropist who made provisions for a poetry foundation after his death. The Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry was incorporated in 1972 in New Mexico to provide grant support for the writing of poetry through nonprofit organizations. Since its inception in 1998, 37 poets have received the Witter Bynner fellowship, including the recently selected 2015 winners. (See page 25.)



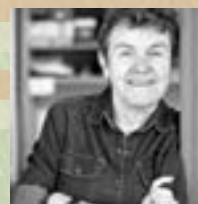
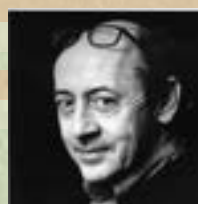
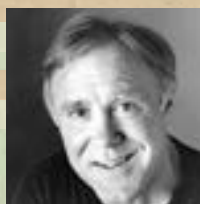
From left, poets Allen Tate, Léonie Adams, T.S. Eliot, Theodore Spencer and Robert Penn Warren attend the annual meeting of the Fellows of the Library of Congress in American Letters, November 1948. *Prints and Photographs Division*



Seven Poets Laureate/Consultants in Poetry returned to the Library for a reading in the Coolidge Auditorium to celebrate publication of "The Poets Laureate Anthology." From left: Librarian of Congress James Billington; Carolyn Brown, former director of the Office of Scholarly Programs; and poets Mark Strand, Charles Simic, Kay Ryan, Maxine Kumin, Daniel Hoffman, Rita Dove and Billy Collins, 2010. *Abby Brack Lewis*



Poetry and Literature Center head Robert Casper applauds 2014 Witter Bynner winners Honorée Fanonne Jeffers (center) and Jake Adam York, whose wife Sarah Skeen (right) accepts his posthumous award. *Amanda Reynolds*



POETRY PROJECTS

Per the legislation establishing the office, the Poet Laureate is appointed solely on the basis of a poet's lifetime literary achievement and has few official responsibilities. However, many Poets Laureate have used the prestige and resources conferred through the position to launch initiatives, and sometime large-scale projects, that seek to introduce—or reintroduce—people to the value of poetry in their everyday lives. Pictured above, from left, the following poets implemented projects with a broad appeal during their tenure:

Joseph Brodsky (1991–1992) developed the idea of providing poetry in public places—supermarkets, hotels, airports, hospitals—where people congregate and “can kill time as time kills them.”

Rita Dove (1993–1995) brought together writers to explore the African diaspora through the eyes of its artists, and also championed children's poetry and jazz through multiple events.

Robert Hass (1995–1997) sponsored a major conference on nature writing, “Watershed,” which continues today as a national poetry, art and environmental impact competition, “River of Words,” for elementary and high school students. (See page 3.)

Billy Collins (2001–2003) encouraged the nation's high-school students to read a poem a day during the 180-day school year. (See page 2.)

Kay Ryan (2008–2010) reached out to the nation's community-college students and professors through a poetry-writing contest and a video conference featuring tips about writing poetry and aspects of her own writing process.

A number of Poets Laureate, such as Robert Pinsky, Ted Kooser and Natasha Trethewey, have also developed poetry projects with unprecedented scope. (See page 12 and left.)

Future Poets Laureate will remain free to shape the position. But one thing is certain: the Poet Laureateship will continue to serve as a national symbol of the government's commitment to honoring, promoting and preserving a place for poetry in American society.

Peter Armenti is the literature specialist for the Digital Reference Section.

► MORE INFORMATION

Poetry and Literature Center
loc.gov/poetry/about.html

Past Poet Laureate Projects
loc.gov/poetry/laureate-projects.html

U.S. Poets Laureate: A Guide to Online Resources
loc.gov/poetry/laureate.html loc.gov/rr/program/bib/poetslaureate



Matt Valentine

WHERE POETRY LIVES

Natasha Trethewey (2012–2014) participated in “Where Poetry Lives,” a series of reports with PBS “NewsHour” Senior Correspondent Jeffrey Brown, which uses poetry as a framework through which to view important issues facing American society. Stories featuring Trethewey have ranged from a profile of the Alzheimer's Poetry Project in Brooklyn, New York, which seeks to help victims of dementia engage their memories through poetry and other forms of language play, to a visit with troubled teens in King County Juvenile Detention Center in Seattle, Washington, who work with the nonprofit Pongo Teen Writing Project to express themselves by turning their stories into poetry.

THE LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS DISCUSSES THE SELECTION OF THE NATION'S POET LAUREATE CONSULTANT IN POETRY.

Robert Casper: You became Librarian of Congress just a few years after Congress passed Public Law 99-194 establishing the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry position and specifying that, "Individuals are appointed to the position by the Librarian of Congress." How did you feel at first about this responsibility?

James H. Billington: I was excited by it because in public schools in the Philadelphia area you had to do a lot of memorizing poetry. I always found that one of my most fun homework assignments. I loved to write. I loved to read. And poetry was the most condensed and the most inspirational form of reading.

RC: You've selected all but the first two of the Library's 20 poets laureate. Can you talk about those 18 laureates and what their collective body of work has meant to you?

JHB: It's proven to me that there is both a national patrimony in the wide variety of people that write poetry and the subjects they write about. There is a real quality to be found in that broad scope. You discover that people write poetry in all kinds of different ways. You widen your perspective, and you gain an enormous appreciation for the number and the range of people who are expressing themselves in poetry. It's a great discovery for me, and I think the people we've picked reflect the diversity of America.

RC: Can you describe the selection process?

JHB: We start by asking people all over the country—past laureates, literary scholars and critics, poetry nonprofit directors, editors and publishers [to recommend poets]. There are a wide variety of people that we get names from. We also consider people that were near misses in previous years, but it's always a fresh search.

RC: In the process of selecting the poet laureate, you get all of those recommended names and you do a lot of reading. Can you talk a bit more about that process of digging into someone's poetry?



JHB: In reading the work of the finalists, maybe a dozen, there are a few things that tend to move me. One is when I discover a poem that makes my hair stand on end. It can be about a very mundane thing, but it really hits me. Who do I keep returning to? Whose work do I actually want to go back to and read more? It's what hits you initially and what you return to after you've read everybody else. I'm not an expert—I'm a lover of poetry. In making the selection you have to kind of be a United States Mr. Everyman.

Librarian of Congress James Billington, right, discusses the Poet Laureate selection process with Robert Casper, head of the Library's Poetry and Literature Center.
Shawn Miller

The Librarian of Congress quoted British Poet Laureate Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) to describe his emotions upon reading "something special."

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean.
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

► MORE INFORMATION

More on Poets Laureate
loc.gov/poetry/laureate.html



BEYOND THE BUS

ROSA PARKS' LIFELONG STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE

BY JEANNE THEOHARIS

▲ Rosa Parks waves from a United Air Lines jetway in Seattle, Washington, one of many trips she took to raise money and awareness for the bus boycott. *Gil Baker, 1956.*

► A commemorative plaque marks the spot on Dexter Avenue in Montgomery, Ala., where Rosa Parks waited for the bus that changed history. *Carol Highsmith*

THE ROSA PARKS COLLECTION AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS SHEDS NEW LIGHT ON THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF THE RENOWNED CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST.

In September 2014, the Library of Congress received a remarkable 10-year loan of the Rosa Parks Collection. Businessman and philanthropist Howard Buffett had purchased the collection, which had languished in an auction house warehouse for years, to ensure the public would benefit from the historical record of Parks' life.

These newly-acquired papers and photographs offer a rare look into the ideas and activities of a woman who changed the nation—not just on a single day on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus (see page 20) but over the course of her life. The material offers an unprecedented look at Parks' speeches, private thoughts and political insights, revealing what it took to be a lifelong fighter for justice. It takes us behind the scenes in the Montgomery bus boycott and her role in it. It demonstrates how broad her political life was after leaving Montgomery for Detroit in 1957. More poignantly, it shows the decade-long toll that her stand against segregation took on her and her family.

Born in Alabama on Feb. 4, 1913, Rosa Louise McCauley had a determined spirit that was nurtured by her mother and grandparents. She chafed under the strictures of segregation. In 1931, she met Raymond Parks, a politically active barber, and they married in 1932. She joined him in organizing in defense of the nine Scottsboro boys, falsely accused of rape.



Her early writings reveal her “determination never to accept it, even if it must be endured,” which led her to “search for a way of working for freedom and first class citizenship.” In 1943, she became secretary of the Montgomery branch of the NAACP and continued that work for the next decade. The branch, under the leadership of Parks and E.D. Nixon, focused on voter registration, youth outreach, pursuing legal remedies for black victims of white brutality and sexual violence and defending the wrongly accused. After years of such efforts, she grew increasingly discouraged by the lack of change. In August 1955, she journeyed to the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, an interracial organizer-training school, for a two-week workshop on school desegregation. The workshop buoyed her spirit.

Parks’ writings reveal that she was well aware that her refusal to give up her bus seat to a white passenger meant she might “be manhandled but I was willing to take the chance ... I suppose when you live this experience ... getting arrested doesn’t seem so bad.” When her arrest on December 1, 1955, sparked a community bus boycott, Parks labored hard to maintain the protest. Part of how the boycott was sustained for more than a year was through an elaborate, labor-intensive car-pool system. For one month, Parks served as a dispatcher, working to sustain the protest and exhorting riders and drivers to keep going. In her detailed instructions to carpool riders and drivers, she wrote, “Remember how long some of us had to wait when the buses passed us without stopping in the morning and evening.”

Fired from her job at Montgomery Fair department store a month into the boycott, Parks spent most of 1956 traveling throughout the country, raising awareness and funds for the movement. Letters home during her travels describe how heady and tiring this work was—meeting Thurgood Marshall, visiting the Statue of Liberty, doing radio interviews and giving numerous speeches.

THE ROSA PARKS COLLECTION

The Rosa Parks Collection at the Library of Congress is on loan for 10 years from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation.



The collection, which contains approximately 7,500 manuscripts and 2,500 photographs, is open to researchers. Several collection items have been added to the Library’s “Civil Rights Act of 1964” exhibition, on view in the Library’s Thomas Jefferson Building through Sept. 12, 2015.

A supplemental display of items from the Parks collection will be on view in the Jefferson Building throughout the month of March. A presentation featuring selected items from the collection will be accessible online later this year.

► MORE INFORMATION

View “The Civil Rights Act of 1964” exhibition
loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act



May 19, 1956

Dear Mother:

This leaves my doing fine. I have had quite a stay here in New York. I was very glad to receive the letters and clippings from you. The people here are very nice. I spent Thursday night with Mr + Mrs. Thurgood Marshall. So much is going on I can't tell it in this letter. It will have to wait till I get home. I am accepting the Washington, D. C. invitation and will be home right afterward. I will stay here for the Madison Square Garden Rally May 24. I hope you and Parks are making out all right. I am not staying with the Meachams now,

Call me when you can. I must close for now, with much love.

Rosa,

P.S. I heard Rev. King speak at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

This letter from Rosa Parks to her mother details her activities in New York in May 1956, including the Madison Square Garden rally for civil rights. Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development



Rosa Parks attends an event with New York Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, circa 1968.

Her efforts, alongside others in Montgomery, helped turn a local struggle into a national movement. "Our non-violent protest has proven to all that no intelligent right thinking person is satisfied with less than human rights that are enjoyed by all people." In her notes for a Nov. 12, 1956, speech about the bus boycott at a local NAACP chapter, she celebrated the Supreme Court's decision against bus segregation, but saw much work ahead.

Bus desegregation did not alleviate the suffering of the Parks family. Working class and living in the Cleveland Courts Projects, the Parks family had encountered periods of economic trouble before, but the toll that Parks' arrest took on her family was enormous and far-reaching. Her bus protest plunged her family into a decade of health and economic instability, which is reflected in their 1955-1965 tax returns.

Both Rosa and Raymond lost their jobs early on in the boycott, developed health problems and never found steady work in Montgomery again. In the summer of 1957, they were forced to move to Detroit, to join her brother and extended family. For a time she worked as a hostess at the inn at Virginia's Hampton Institute. But an ulcer and unhappiness about being away from her family made her leave the position and return to Detroit in late 1958. In 1959, they moved into the Progressive Civic League to serve as the building's caretakers but



Civil rights activist Kwame Touré (formerly known as Stokely Carmichael) shares a lighter moment with Rosa Parks at a University of Michigan civil rights forum in 1983. *United Press International*

had difficulty making the rent or even affording a refrigerator. Her health worsened, landing her in the hospital. She would not work steadily again until 1965.

But Parks' political efforts continued. She protested housing segregation, participated in Detroit's Great March for Freedom and attended the March on Washington in August 1963. The following year, Parks volunteered on John Conyers' first congressional campaign for Michigan's newly redrawn first district, on a platform of "Jobs, Justice, Peace." After he was elected to Congress, Conyers hired her to work in his Detroit office, where she remained until her retirement in 1988.

Like Montgomery, Detroit was plagued with racial and social inequity. Her work with constituents in Rep. Conyers' office, along with her own experiences in the city, made her keenly aware of the issues—from poverty and job discrimination to lack of access to health care and housing segregation to school inequality and police brutality.

Rosa Parks' political activities in Detroit were even more diverse than they had been in Montgomery. She worked on prisoner support,

helped run the Detroit chapter of the Friends of SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and took part in the growing movement against U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Attending scores of events and meetings across the city, she traveled regularly to take part in the growing Black Power movement across the country. When asked by a reporter from *Sepia* magazine in 1974 how she managed to do so much, she demurred, "I do what I can."

In 1987, she and long-time friend Elaine Steele started the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development, which continues today to educate youth about the struggle for civil and human rights.

On a drugstore bag found in her collection, an elderly Rosa Parks doodled over and over, "The Struggle Continues." Hers lasted a lifetime, as her collection at the Library of Congress reveals.

► MORE INFORMATION

View "The Civil Rights Act of 1964" exhibition
loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act



Detroit Congressman John Conyers is joined by his staff member, Rosa Parks, 1986.

Jeanne Theoharis is distinguished professor of political science at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, and author of "The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks," which won a 2014 NAACP Image Award.

TAKING A STAND TO STAY SEATED

On the evening of Dec. 1, 1955, a Montgomery, Alabama, bus driver ordered a black woman to relinquish her seat to a white passenger. Rosa Parks disobeyed the driver's order and refused to move. The driver called the police, who arrested Parks for violating a city segregation ordinance. The arrest was recorded (pictured at right), and Parks was released later that night.

Parks, a middle-aged seamstress, was not the first to resist bus segregation. Prior to the boycott, a number of petitions had been delivered to the bus company and city commissioner. Others made similar protests and refused to move when instructed by bus drivers or police.

In the wake of her arrest, civil rights leaders called for a one-day bus boycott, which coincided with Parks' Dec. 5 trial. Local activists considered Parks the ideal plaintiff for a test case against segregation—a long-time community activist and churchgoer, she was well respected in the African American community. As Parks was found guilty and fined \$14, the first successful day of protest was held and leaders decided to continue the boycott. In February 1956, the police orchestrated a mass arrest of boycott leaders, including Parks (pictured on page 21) and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who gained national attention for the year-long protest. The boycott continued in the face of arrests and harassment from police. The boycott officially ended Dec. 20, 1956, when the city passed an ordinance mandating integration on the buses, following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision finding bus segregation unconstitutional.

—Marwa Amer is a doctoral student in history at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Frank Johnson Papers, Manuscript Division

A TRANSCRIPT Of The RECORD AND PROCEEDINGS Before The RECORDER'S COURT In the Case of The City of Montgomery

vs.

Rosa Parks

Charge

Viol. Chapter 6

Section 11-22

Appealed to the Circuit Court of
Montgomery

Case on Docket Dec 1 1955

Tried 5 day of Dec 1955

Appealed 5 day of Dec 1955

DAVIS PRINTING-LITHO



POETIC JUSTICE

In 1999, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Rita Dove turned her focus to that historic moment in 1955 when Rosa Parks made a decision that would affect the course of the Civil Rights Movement.

Dove, the first African American Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry (1993-1995), recalled:

“In my book ‘On the Bus with Rosa Parks,’ I speculate not only on Rosa Parks’ historic non-doing, her refusing to give up her seat on the segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama, 1955, but also on any moment in history when one is suddenly confronted with a choice—what would one do.”

The poem “Rosa” from “On the Bus with Rosa Parks,” used by permission of the author and the publisher. W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1999; originally published in *Georgia Review*, Winter 1998. © 1998 by Rita Dove.

► MORE INFORMATION

Rita Dove reads at the National Book Festival
go.usa.gov/JmaF

ROSA

How she sat there,
the time right inside a place
so wrong it was ready.

That trim name with
its dream of a bench
to rest on. Her sensible coat.

Doing nothing was the doing:
the clean flame of her gaze
carved by a camera flash.

How she stood up
when they bent down to retrieve
her purse. That courtesy.

RYTA DOVE

THE PRESS AT THE PALACE



LOVE IN THE STACKS

A ROMANCE THAT BEGAN AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS IN THE 1930s LED TO THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL POETRY PRIZE.

Several years before former president Lyndon Baines Johnson's 1937 election to the U.S. House of Representatives from the state of Texas, his younger sister Rebekah was pursuing a Washington career of her own. While in graduate school, she worked in the cataloging department of the Library of Congress. Her co-worker, Oscar Price Bobbitt, had also come to Washington from Texas—on a train ticket bought by the sale of a cow. A romance blossomed between the two.

Speaking at the Library in 1998, their son, the author Philip C. Bobbitt, provided some background on his parents' courtship, which culminated with their marriage in 1941.

"I discovered a cache of old index cards, apparently used as surreptitious notes passed by my parents to each other under the eyes of a superintendent who supposed, perhaps, that Mother was typing Dewey decimals. ... On each was typed an excerpt from a poem. The long campaign by which my father moved from conspiratorial co-worker to confidant to suitor was partly played out in the indexing department of the Library."

Following her death in 1978 at age 68, her husband and son decided to endow a memorial in her honor.

"Owing to the history I have described," Bobbitt added, "the Library of Congress was suggested as a possible recipient of this memoriam."

Thus, the Rebekah Bobbitt Johnson National Prize for Poetry was established at the Library in 1988, and awarded biennially since 1990. The \$10,000 prize recognizes the most distinguished book of poetry written by an American and published during the preceding two years, or the lifetime achievement of an American poet. Charles Wright, the current Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry, was awarded the Bobbitt Prize for lifetime achievement in 2008. Poet Patricia Smith recently received the 2014 Bobbitt Prize for her work, "Shoulda Been Jimi Savannah." (See page 25.)

"The Bobbitt family's relation to the Library is a great love story and it is too good not to want to savor, commemorate and celebrate," said Librarian of Congress James H. Billington.

—Audrey Fischer

◀ A bust of Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt by sculptor David Deming was presented to the Library in 1998 to mark the 10th anniversary of the Bobbitt Prize. *Shawn Miller*



Shawn Miller

MORE INFORMATION:

Thomas Jefferson Building,
First Floor
10 First Street S.E.,
Washington, D.C.
20540
202.707.3399

Hours:
Monday, Wednesday,
Thursday:
8:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Friday,
Saturday:
8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed Sunday and
federal holidays

**Obtain a Reader
Identification Card**
[loc.gov/rr/
readerregistration.html](http://loc.gov/rr/readerregistration.html)

**Visit the Main Reading
Room Online**
loc.gov/rr/main

Request Reference Services
[loc.gov/rr/askalib/ask-
main.html](http://loc.gov/rr/askalib/ask-main.html)

THE PRINCIPAL LOCATION for gaining access to the Library's general collections of books and bound periodicals is the Main Reading Room in the Thomas Jefferson Building. The Main Reading Room houses a general reference collection of more than 70,000 volumes, with an emphasis on the humanities, social sciences and bibliography.

Each day, hundreds of books and bound periodical volumes are delivered from the Library's stacks for use in the Main Reading Room. The Main Reading Room is open

to researchers age 16 and above. All researchers must have a current Reader Identification Card.

The Library of Congress hosts a special public open house twice each year, which provides visitors with an opportunity learn about the Library and to enter and photograph the Main Reading Room. The Presidents Day open house on Feb. 16, 2015, featured a reading by poet Patricia Smith (pictured above), the recipient of the 2014 Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry.



1



2



3



4



5



6

1. From left, the Library's Luis Clavell moderates a discussion on Jan. 15 about civil rights activist Rosa Parks with Elaine Steele and Anita Peek of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development and Ella McCall Haygan of the D.C. chapter of Pathways to Freedom, one of the institute's programs.

2. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor speaks with D.C. Public Charter School students following a presentation about Magna Carta at the Library's Young Readers Center on Jan. 5.

3. U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Stephen G. Breyer speaks at the Library's "Magna Carta: Muse and Mentor" Symposium, held Dec. 9.

4. U.S. Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-N.J.) takes a ceremonial oath of office on Jan 6 in the Library's Madison Hall prior to joining the 114th Congress.

5. U.S. Rep. James Lankford (R-Okla.) thanks supporters at a reception in Madison Hall following the swearing-in of the 114th Congress on Jan. 6.

6. Emily Fine, daughter of American composer Irving Fine, looks at memorabilia prior to a Dec. 5 concert performance as part of a Library of Congress celebration honoring the centennial of her father's birth.

All photos | Shawn Miller

LIBRARIAN OF CONGRESS MAKES SENIOR STAFF APPOINTMENTS

Librarian of Congress James H. Billington has announced the appointment of David S. Mao as deputy librarian of Congress, Robert R. Newlen as chief of staff and Mark Sweeney as associate librarian for Library Services.

Mao was appointed deputy law librarian in 2010, following a five-year tenure in the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Prior to that, he practiced law for several years and later held positions in the libraries of Georgetown University and the international law firm of Covington and Burling. Newlen joined the Library of Congress in November 1975 and has served in a wide range of areas and roles, including assistant law librarian for collections, outreach and services in the Law Library. Before that, he served in several leadership roles within CRS, including assistant director of the Knowledge Services Group and director of the CRS Legislative Relations Office. Sweeney joined the Library's Serial and Government Publications Division in 1987, and has held a series of progressively more responsible positions in the division, including head of the Newspaper Section and division chief. He has also served as chief of the Humanities and Social Sciences Division and, most recently, as chief of the Preservation Directorate. He has served as acting associate librarian for Library Services since August 2014.

► **MORE:** loc.gov/today/pr/2015/15-012.html

THEATRICAL DESIGNS ON DISPLAY

A new Library exhibition, "Grand Illusion: The Art of the Theatrical Design," shows how designers create their magic, with a behind-the-scenes look at stage productions, from the Baroque courts of Europe to the Broadway venues of the United States. Items in the exhibition are drawn from the Library's theatrical design collections. The 43 exhibition items—most on public display for the first time—feature the work of 21 designers, including Nicholas Roerich, Robert Edmond Jones, Boris Aronson, Oliver Smith, Florence Klotz and Tony Walton, relating to 28 separate stage productions. Made possible through the generous support of the Ira and Lenore Gershwin Trust for the benefit of the Library of Congress, the exhibition will be on view through July 25 in the Performing Arts Reading Room.

► **MORE:** loc.gov/today/pr/2015/15-013.html

PATRICIA SMITH RECEIVES BOBBITT PRIZE FOR POETRY

Patricia Smith has been awarded the Library's 2014 Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry for her book "Shoulda Been Jimi Savannah." The prize is awarded for the most distinguished book of poetry published in the preceding two years or the lifetime achievement of an American poet.

Smith is the author of six poetry collections, including "Blood Dazzler" (2008), a finalist for the National Book Award, and "Teahouse of the Almighty" (2006), a National Poetry Series selection. Smith was inducted into the International Literary Hall of Fame for Writers of African Descent, and is the recipient of fellowships from both the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo. A four-time National Poetry Slam individual champion, she is the most successful slammer in the competition's history. Smith will read her poetry at the Library on April 6, 2015.

► **MORE:** loc.gov/today/pr/2014/14-212.html

POETRY FELLOWS SELECTED



Courtesy of Emily Fragos

Poets Emily Fragos and Bobby C. Rogers have been selected by Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry Charles Wright to receive the 2015 Witter Bynner Fellowship awards. The \$10,000 fellowship supports the writing of poetry.



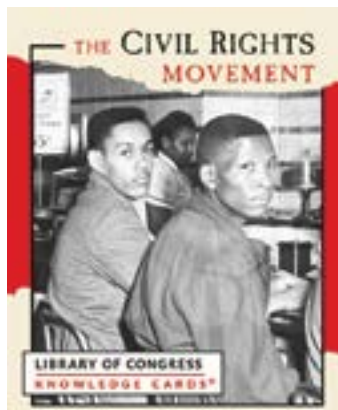
Audrey Fleming

Fragos is the author of two books of poems, including "Hostage: New & Selected Poems" (2011) and "Little Savage" (2011) and the editor of five poetry anthologies. Her other honors include a 2014 Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry and a 2014 American Academy of Arts and Letters Literature Award.

Rogers is the author of "Paper University" (2010), winner of the 2009 Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize. He is the recipient of the Greensboro Review Literary Prize in Poetry and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

► **MORE:** loc.gov/today/pr/2015/15-022.html

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS SHOP celebrates poetry, poets and the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act.

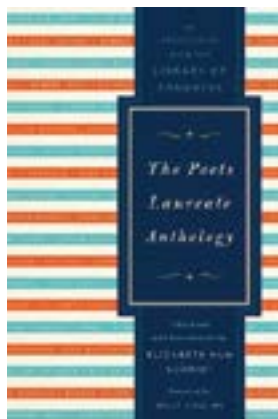


Knowledge Cards: The Civil Rights Movement

Product # 21507999

Price: \$9.95

This deck of 48 Knowledge Cards offers a concise illustrated history of the brave people who led the civil rights movement.

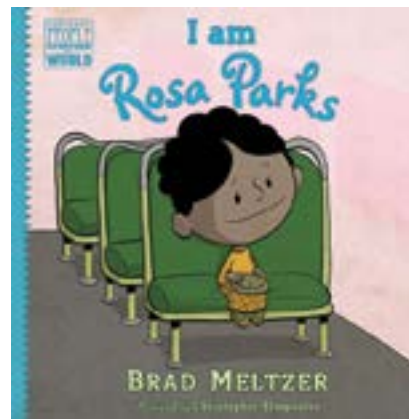


The Poets Laureate Anthology

Product # 21108105

Price: \$39.95

With works from 43 poets laureate, this volume contains much of the best poetry written in America over the last century.

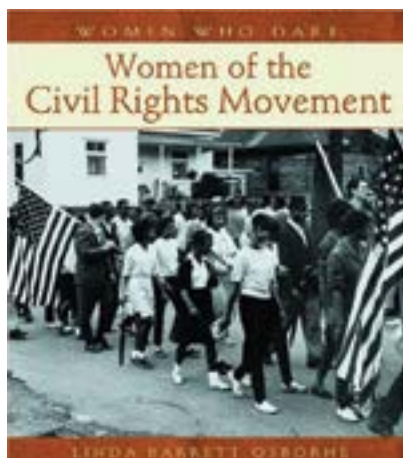


I Am Rosa Parks by Brad Meltzer

Product # 21106788

Price: \$12.95

"We can all be heroes" is the message of this illustrated children's biography of Rosa Parks, an inspiring figure in American history.

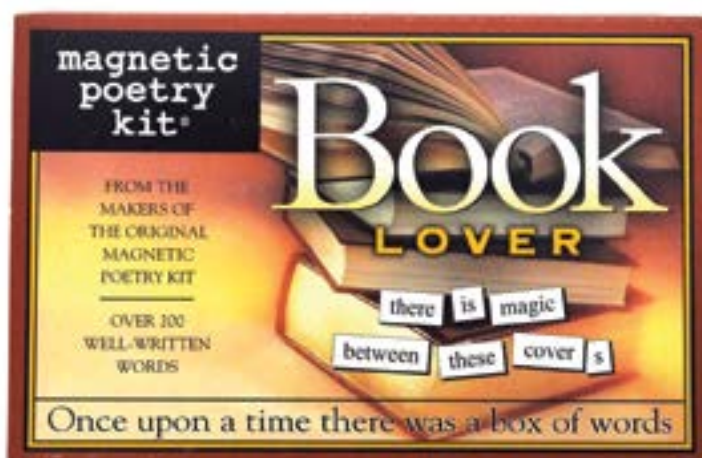


"Women of the Civil Rights Movement"

Product # 21107159

Price: \$12.95

This book discusses courageous women like Rosa Parks and Diane Nash who were involved in the American civil rights movement.



Magnetic Poetry Kit

Product # 21504084

Price: \$12

With more than 200 magnetized words, this kit is the perfect gift for poetry lovers.

► MORE INFORMATION

Order online: www.loc.gov/shop

Order by phone: 888.682.3557

Order by fax: 202.707.1771

A LARGESSE FOR LITERATURE

WITH SUPPORT FROM PHILANTHROPISTS, THE LIBRARY HAS CHAMPIONED POETRY AND LITERATURE FOR MORE THAN 75 YEARS.

The Library's Poetry and Literature Center and its Poet Laureate position were founded thanks to two progressive benefactors. With gifts from new friends, its literary programs continue to grow and reach broader audiences.

In 1936, philanthropist Archer M. Huntington (pictured at right) created an endowment for the "maintenance of a Chair of Poetry of the English language in the Library of Congress." The Chair of Poetry, first appointed in 1937, became the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry position, so named by an act of Congress in 1985. The Laureateship—the only federally funded position for a literary artist—represents the pinnacle of the art. (See pages 10 – 14.)

In 1950, Gertrude Clarke Whittall (pictured at right), who also funded the construction of the Library's Whittall Pavillion and gave the Library five Stradivari instruments, established a "Poetry Fund," to be used "to promote the appreciation and understanding of poetry," primarily through a series of lectures and poetry readings. This gift also established the Poetry Room in the Library's Thomas Jefferson Building, which opened on April 23, 1951—William Shakespeare's birthday. Today, the Poetry and Literature Center is the home of the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. Mrs. Whittall also donated a furniture collection that gives the space an air of elegance and charm.

The Huntington and Whittall endowments support the majority of the Library's poetry programs. However, as the Laureateship has grown, and as Laureates have taken on high-profile projects, the Library has continued to reach out to the private sector for support. Last year, Consuelo Duroc-Danner, a longtime Library of Congress James Madison Council member, funded the Laureate's opening reading and closing program—the highlight events of the Library's literary season.



"The Laureateship has consistently been held by exceptional American poets who present and speak about poetry in a way that is both accessible and inspiring," said Duroc-Danner. "I find the opportunity to hear the lectures of these distinguished poets enormously rewarding personally and very enriching for the nation as a whole. American poetry deserves a national stage and I am happy and honored to play a part in this essential cultural project."

The Library recently launched Friends of the Poetry and Literature Center to engage more people in its programs and to continue the philanthropic tradition of its founders. With their support, the Library looks forward to celebrating poets and inspiring a love of poetry for years to come.

—Robert Casper is head of the Poetry and Literature Center.

► MORE INFORMATION

Friends of the Poetry & Literature Center
loc.gov/poetry/supportus

Make a Gift to the Library
 202.707.2777
loc.gov/philanthropy



Holly Wright

CHARLES WRIGHT, THE 2014-2015 POET LAUREATE CONSULTANT IN POETRY, DISCUSSES HIS LOVE OF POETRY.

When did you first begin to read and write poetry?

It was when I was in the army, serving in Italy in 1959. I read a poem that I really liked in the location in which it was written. A friend of mine had given me selected poems of Ezra Pound and said, "When you go to the Sermione Peninsula on Lake Garda, read this poem." It was a poem called "Blandula, Tenulla, Vagula," and it really hit me. I tried to write prose but I couldn't tell a story, and here was something that didn't have a narrative line. It had an imagistic line from top to bottom. And so I read more of Pound and then sort of read whatever I could get my hands on. But that's when I started, when I was 23 years old.

Which other poets have influenced you?

Every poet you read influences you, if it's only for five minutes or for a couple of years. I think my two favorite poets would be Emily Dickinson and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Emily Dickinson's content, her subject matter, the kind of impossibility of transcending this ordinary life and knowing that that was impossible, that struck a bell with me. I love the music of Hopkins' poetry. His strange and enthralling kind of metrics was a big influence on me.

How have your southern roots influenced your work?

I don't come out of a southern narrative tradition but I am a southerner and so, therefore, I guess I have southern roots in my poetry. I like being a southerner so maybe that's had something to do with it. But I don't really write on southern themes as such.

You continue to be exceptionally prolific. What inspires you?

Fear. Fear that I wouldn't get anything else done. I finally found something I could do, which was writing poetry. If I did it well or not, I've never known, but I could do it. I sort of didn't do anything else once I discovered poetry. I do like words. I like the music of words. I like the music of poetry. I like the music of language.

What was your reaction to being appointed Poet Laureate?

Fear again, I guess. I said, "Well, I guess I better do it," because I've known people who did do it and it was obviously doable. But I'm not really a public person, so it was with some skepticism on my part. But it's going all right, so I'm happy I did so. Poetry has been a lifesaver for me. You have to read it seriously before it gets to you, gets through to you. Because poetry is a kind of separate language. It's a language that ... says less and means more.

As an English professor, what is your opinion of today's young writers?

I'm a retired English professor. I haven't been teaching for about five years. But I don't think they read much. And that's what you've got to do if you want to write poetry. Poet Theodore Roethke said, "You want to write? There's the library. You've got to go in and read."

Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Charles Wright is the author of 24 collections of poetry. His final event as Laureate, with former Laureate Charles Simic and Poetry magazine editor Don Share, will take place at the Library April 30.

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"Light of Poetry" is one in a series of panels that comprise the "Spectrum of Light" mural by artist Carl Guthertz, which adorns the ceiling of the Members Room in the Library's Thomas Jefferson Building. *Carol Highsmith*



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